

Creating brand love for libraries: can we be a kind of paradise?

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"I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library"
— Jorge Luis Borges [1]

A few months ago, I came across an article in the *New York Times* on the demise of Windows Live. A quote in the article caught my eye: "brand-love research shows that loved brands reflect and symbolize deeply held personal values, such as Apple does for creativity" [2]. The quote was from Rajeev Batra, a professor in the School of Business at Stanford University, who writes and studies the concept of "brand love." What struck me was the statement that "loved brands reflect and symbolize deeply held personal values" [2]. I always thought the best-loved brands symbolized power, like Ferrari; or "coolness", like a Mac; or maybe made you feel fashionable, like Coach handbags. "Personal values" reminded me of libraries. I wondered, "Could libraries inspire brand love?"

The American Marketing Association defines "brand image" as "the perception of a brand in the minds of persons. The brand image is a mirror reflection (though perhaps inaccurate) of the brand personality or product being branded. It is what people believe about a brand—their thoughts, feelings, expectations" [3]. "Brand love" goes beyond "brand image." Brand love is characterized by a sense of natural comfort and fit, a feeling of emotional connectedness and bonding with the brand, a deep integration of the brand with a consumer's core values, a heightened level of desire and interaction, and a commitment to the brand's long-term use [4]. People love brands that not only offer high quality, but also that appear to be extensions of what they value and of who they would like to be. Most important for our discussion here, brand love brings with it many rewards for the brand. It is associated with positive word of

mouth, brand loyalty, increased willingness to pay a price premium, resistance to negative information, and forgiveness of brand failures. Especially now, when convincing users of the value of our libraries has become such a pressing task, aren't these all associations that we would like our users to make with our libraries?

The distinction between intrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards is key to understanding brand love. To quote Batra,

There is a common distinction between performing an act to get something (extrinsic rewards) and doing it because you love it (intrinsic rewards). A loved brand provides intrinsic rewards when it creates psychological states such as happiness, which are perceived as being part and parcel of using the product (e.g., Pinkberry frozen yogurt *is* delicious). Loved brands commonly provide both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, so providing extrinsic rewards was not a problem per se. However, when brands provided only extrinsic rewards, respondents often felt they did not really love the brand but rather were just using it to get something else that they did love. [italics added] [4]

I would argue that, as librarians, we have tended to concentrate our branding efforts on the extrinsic rewards that our libraries offer. We emphasize access to information, access to staff who can help people find the information they need, a comfortable space in which to study, and so on. People are encouraged to use libraries to get something else they need, information. In contrast, brands people love focus on the pleasure one gets from using the product: Using Apple products makes you feel creative, using eco-friendly soap makes you feel virtuous, and so on. Extrinsic rewards make people like a brand; intrinsic rewards make them love it.

Would it even be possible for people to feel brand love for their health sciences library? Let us look at each of the ten components of

brand love described by Batra and see if they could characterize our libraries.

1. Great quality/qualities

Loved brands are ones that consumers perceive are the best available in one or more attributes. The loved brand might have the best gas mileage, like a Prius; have the smoothest ride, like an Audi; or be the most cost-effective mode of transportation, like a city bus. Libraries are good sources of information, but in which ways are we the *best* source? Studies continue to show that people turn first to their colleagues for information [5], so we can hardly say we are the most convenient. It is also difficult to claim that we have the most authoritative information, since any search in our databases will turn up outdated or unproven material along with the right answer. However, we probably do provide access to a greater quantity of evidence related to health sciences than do our competitors. We could reasonably claim to be the best place for a comprehensive, evidence-based search of the literature.

Note that sometimes what a product is "best" at is not directly related to the product's extrinsic value. I recently bought a new car, and the dealer urged me to use them for my warranty service, not because they have the best service department in town, but because they have the best customer service. I expect that is because warranty service is all pretty much the same, but customer service is an area in which they can excel. In the same way, there are certainly qualities unrelated to the quality or quantity of information, such as customer service, that a library might decide to emphasize as its advantage over the competition.

2. Strongly held values and existential meaning

Loved brands are ones that the consumer connects to something

deeper than the obvious benefits that accrue from using the brand. Brands that support close personal relationships (think of mobile apps that make it easier to meet friends, for example, or objects that are popular gifts) or brands that connect to deeply held values are more likely to be loved. Although libraries could stress their function as a place to meet people, a connection with deeply held values seems a more obvious value to emphasize, especially now that so much use of libraries is digital. Using a library has traditionally been a sign of an educated, knowledgeable person as well as a person who appreciates ideas and an individual who pursues lifelong learning. These would all seem to be values that typical users of medical libraries still hold deeply. Our users tend to think of themselves as educated, knowledgeable, idea-oriented, and engaged in lifelong learning. Brand love research suggests that if we can find a way to emphasize these values, then we can strengthen our users' attachment to our brand. If people associate using library resources with being smart, aware of the latest medical research, at the top of their class, and so on, then they are likely to have strong, positive feelings toward the library.

3. Intrinsic rewards

As noted above, brand love depends on both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Loved brands not only deliver something to the user that the user needs, they also are seen to create positive feelings such as happiness, admiration from others, control of one's life, and so on. Can we associate such feelings with libraries? Certainly it seems possible to associate feelings of success with libraries. People who use the literature that we provide should be more successful clinicians, better teachers, or higher scoring students. Possibly, feelings of control could be associated with our libraries as well. For example, suggesting that students who use the library have confidence when they take the board exams or wait for their match results implies that

use of libraries makes the world a more predictable place. Suggesting that use of health sciences libraries will deliver success and control could be a way to offer intrinsic rewards and thereby create brand love for libraries.

4. Self-identity

People strongly identify with the brands they love. They tend to think of the brand as representing the qualities they have or would like to have. For example, musicians may identify with a music store or a particular CD because it represents the creative qualities they see in themselves. A particular restaurant may be loved not only for the food, but because the ambiance is something that the consumer identifies with: gourmet, quirky, bohemian, and so on. While it may be stretch to think of people identifying with the library, we should recognize that the choices we make for our library's image can influence brand love. For example, for faculty and students who think of themselves as serious intellectuals, a quiet, well-stocked library (or its online counterpart) can represent an extension of the qualities they admire in themselves. Libraries who emphasize their art collections or who conduct game nights for undergraduates would be trying to strengthen brand love with a different kind of clientele. Brand love research suggests that trying to be all things to all people might not be a good strategy for building support for the brand.

5. Positive affect, 6. passionate desire and a sense of natural fit, and 7. emotional bonding and anticipated heartbreak

I have grouped these three components together because they are all ways that one can tell a person loves a brand, rather than a trait of the brand itself. You would know your library was loved if people described it in very positive ways, using passionate terms and indicating that they would be upset if they did not have access to it. To

some extent, this was characteristic of academic libraries in the twentieth century. People described the library as "the heart of the university," and faculty took pride in the depth of their libraries' collections. They became upset (and in some cases still do) when branch libraries were closed or consolidated. The digital era seems to have diminished this kind of brand love of the library, probably because it was attached to a physical entity. The challenge facing us is to recapture these feelings for our now mostly electronic presence.

8. Willingness to invest and 9. frequent thought and use

I was fascinated to learn that a characteristic of loved brands is that people are willing to put high levels of time, energy, and money into them. They interact with the brand frequently and use that as a measure of how much they love it. Libraries have been concerned that people are not aware that their access to online information is paid for by the library; in the context of brand love, this concern takes on new importance. The library subscribes to journals and databases on behalf of its clientele, but since gaining access to these journals and databases does not require going through the library (one can search on Google Scholar and go directly to a needed article, for example), users are unaware of the library's involvement in meeting their information needs. So in the digital age, users might be interacting with our products frequently, an important part of brand love, but not even realize it. Making people aware of what we are providing to them is clearly something we need to continue to strive to communicate if we want to achieve the positive results of brand love.

10. Length of use

Long use of a product is a typical feature of brand love and an important one, because it strengthens the users' identity with the brand. Here, health sciences libraries

would seem to have a clear advantage. Most students use library collections regularly throughout their undergraduate years and on through medical school. Faculty and clinicians continue to use the literature as they engage in teaching and/or research. This typical pattern of long use is something health sciences libraries can build on to create a strong relationship with our users, the kind of relationship that characterizes brand love.

In sum then, health sciences libraries have many of the qualities that can lead to brand love. The values that we represent—education, learning, success, creativity, initiative, and persistence—are all ones that many, if not most, of our users identify with. We can offer intrinsic rewards for associating with our libraries, such as attaining the rewards of success, achieving status among one's peers, and being in control. We interact with most of our users over a long period of time, allowing us to build a strong relationship with them and to encourage them to identify with our brand. We do face some challenges, of course. We have competitors and need to be clear about what it is that we do best. Our brand is not always obvious to users at the point at which they use our services (digitally). Our need to appeal to a variety of users might dilute our ability to encourage any single group to identify with us. However, these challenges should not be insurmountable, if we remember the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and focus on emphasizing more than just the services we offer.

How do we go about creating brand love? How do we get that positive word-of-mouth, increased

willingness to pay a price premium, resistance to negative information, and forgiveness of brand failures that characterize loved brands? We can begin by emphasizing our association with the values that we want users to identify with. Testimonials on our home pages from successful students, graphics that emphasize the intellectual quality and scholarly nature of our libraries, and tag lines that describe intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards can all be elements of a branding campaign. Careful consideration of why we are the "best," selection of activities to encourage identification by the most important of our user groups, and continued efforts to be sure that users know it is the library that is providing them access to the literature are other strategies that we need to emphasize. Our associations, including the Medical Library Association, should also be encouraged to go beyond describing the extrinsic values that libraries deliver and begin to communicate our value more broadly, stressing our qualities that people will love.

In an earlier editorial, I said:

Perhaps the passing of the academic library will not matter much to academia in general, but for those of us dedicated to quality health care, guaranteeing the continuing existence of some entity (whether we call it a library or not) that ensures that physicians and patients still have access to high-quality, accurate, health-related information should be a priority. [6]

I still believe this to be the case. Fostering brand love may help to ensure that this access continues. However, achieving brand love

requires that we adopt a mindset that takes us beyond the narrow scope of what we can do for our users and leads us to emphasize the values of the library that we, and they, have long admired. We need to convince them that the *opposite* of that famous quote above, from Jorge Luis Borges, is equally true. The Library is a kind of Paradise.

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